

Science Seeking the First Story of the Flood in the Buried City of Abraham



All That Remains of Ur of the Chaldees, from an Old Engraving.

The Search in Lost "Ur of the Chaldees" for the World's First Library and Its Revelations of the Gigantic Catastrophe Whose Memory Is Found in the Sacred History of Every Race and Tribe

THIS great world-war is going to build as well as destroy. It promises to solve more than one new problem of modern life, and is quite as sure to shed a flood of light upon questions which have seemed almost past human understanding.

Professor Langdon of the University of Pennsylvania has pointed the way to a most promising field of investigation and discovery. He has discovered upon a very careful and close study of some of the thousands of Babylonian clay tablets in the museum of the University, brought as they were from the great library of Nippur, that some of the most important inscriptions were actually copies of still more ancient tablets, which are as yet undiscovered. And Professor Langdon has done very much more, for he has ascertained the very site at which the American excavator must plant his spade, if he is to bring to light tablets which will astound the religious world, carrying back the history of human thought thousands of years.

References upon the tablets of Nippur to still older tablets, which were the originals, of which these are comparatively late copies, have proved to him and to other scholars that if the originals are to be uncovered the excavators will have to dig long and deeply upon the site of ancient Ur. Ur was the city from which, according to Genesis, xi., 31, Abraham emigrated when he went to the Promised Land, with his family and his nephew, Lot.

Fortunately for the projected work the site of Ur has been known ever since 1847, when Sir Henry Rawlinson, the famous and original British Babylonian scholar, deciphered inscribed tablets found in the ruin mounds of what the Arabs called Mugheir, proving that here once stood the mighty city of Ur, with its majestic temple to Sin, the Moon-God.

It lies on the west bank of the Euphrates, half way between Babylon and the Persian Gulf. It was undoubtedly the great capital of Babylon at the earliest period of the civilization of that powerful monarchy, and thus helps to bear out Professor Langdon's suggestion that here will be found the primeval originals of that extensive literature which furnished to the Hebrews the material out of which they built up the earlier chapters of the Bible itself.

For more than sixty years, or ever since the first translation of the Deluge Tablets was made by George Smith, scholars have recognized the more than striking similarity between the story of the flood, as told in the Bible, and as deciphered upon the clay tablets found in the ruins of Nineveh. But how the Hebrews possessed themselves of this very ancient Semitic tradition was a constant puzzle to students of the Bible, who had no record before them of any contact between the Hebrews and the city of Nineveh in very ancient times.

Many a scholar has desired to dig over the ruins of Ur, simply because it had been the home of Abraham, and not for a moment suspecting that here was all that Professor Langdon promises, but the Turkish Government refused to grant a firman, or permission, because that would have meant that they would give adequate protection to the excavating party, and that they were not in a position to offer, be-



One of the Clay Tablets from Nippur, on Which Was Found Evidence of the Existence of the Oldest Library of Man Buried Somewhere in Ancient, Crumbling Ur.

cause the wild Arabs of Southern Babylonia barely acknowledged the rule of the Sultan, and preyed upon any unwary travellers who were so foolish as to come that way.

Matters promise very differently as a result of the war. Great Britain has been forcing her way through Mesopotamia, and under her rule will come peace and protection for Europeans and Americans as well as for the native Arabs, who will be compelled to become law-abiding. The prospect is therefore most encouraging for some splendid work at Ur and other sites in that important district, the very moment that peace is secured. The ready spade of the excavator will be at work at the earliest possible moment, and from the dry sands and lofty mounds of these ruins may come new revelations of the life and literature of the third, fourth and possibly the fifth millennium before the Christian Era. For Abraham lived about 2100 B. C., and that was by no means the beginning of Babylonian civilization and culture.

From that ancient time will come, according to Professor Langdon, Dr. Sayce and other scholars, the great original tablets on which the first of the Babylonian priests wrote down their tale of the deluge, man's early attempt to solve the problem of sinners and righteous men on earth.

In the later version and copies already translated we know that the Babylonian Noah built his ark, took aboard his family and the animals which were to be kept alive, and that he sent forth a raven and a dove, just as the Noah of the Bible did. But how much closer the older version will come to the Bible narrative, we do not know. If it is found, however, it will go far toward establishing the fact that Abraham took the story with him when he emigrated to Palestine, and that in the Promised Land the story was worked over, and preserved, until it reached the hands of Moses, and other editors, many generations afterward.

New discoveries that back up and support a remarkable prophecy made two years ago by Dr. Stephen Herbert Langdon, one of the world's foremost Sumerian scholars, have just been made at the Museum of the University of Pennsylvania in the translation of ancient cuneiform tablets written in the dynasty of Isin, but based on the religious practices of a still earlier period in Babylonian history. Dr. Langdon is now serving with the British army in France. Before he left this country he was curator of the Babylonian section of the University Museum and he is also a tutor of Jesus College, Oxford.

For the best part of a lifetime Dr. Langdon has been studying and translating the cuneiform tablets of the world's earliest civilization, from Nippur and other cities of ancient Babylonia, once inhabited by the Sumerians, in the British Museum and, in more recent years, the University Museum. His and other discoveries of tablets in the Temple Library of Nippur and in the library of Asurbanipal have given to the world volumes of information within the last decade of the earliest civilization of which written record has been found.

But in the reading of these tablets, some of them fully five thousand years old, Dr. Langdon found so many references to earlier works that a little less than two years ago he became convinced that the great

odes and liturgies of the Sumerians and later Babylonians were either copied from, or inspired by, a library of knowledge still older. In expressing this belief, he said:

"Nippur is no longer a virgin field. Excavations have been made by the Germans, the English and the American museums at other points, too. But I am convinced that in spite of all the great discoveries which have been made in the last dozen years the work so far accomplished has hardly scratched the surface. Nippur is in the midst of a large number of buried cities that probably were populous before Nippur was thought of. Among them, to mention but two, are Ur of the Chaldees, and Warka—the Ararat of the Bible. According to Genesis Ur of the Chaldees was the birthplace of Abraham."

The University Museum has just now made public a remarkable partial verification of Dr. Langdon's ideas from the very people he has been studying so long—the Sumerians. Just before he returned to England to enter the army he discovered and translated a series of tablets containing a "Liturgy to the Word." From the religious point of view it is important chiefly in that it carries back the idea of Logos some two thousand years. But from the popular viewpoint the interesting point is that a great part of the lengthy liturgy now translated for the first time is devoted to a lamentation over the destruction of Ur.

At the same time the Museum has made public a brief account by Dr. A. H. Sayce, the noted Oxford scholar, of some Cappadocian tablets found in the University Museum. He states:

"We now know the date to which the tablets must be assigned. The forms of the characters and the proper names belong to the period of the Third Dynasty of Ur, before Christ 2500, and one of them is dated in the reign of a king of that dynasty. They show that at that early epoch eastern Asia Minor was under the control of the Babylonian government and that Babylonian civilization was firmly planted there."

In this region, inhabited by the Hittites, women had almost the same status as men. Nearly every reference on one of the tablets to a prefect, who ruled over the cities, is followed by a reference to the prefectess, or woman mayor.

Although the discovery by Dr. Sayce is the first definite indication that women enjoyed positions of authority in the government of ancient civilization, sharing with men presumably on a basis of equality, the lore of all Babylonia is replete with records showing that woman's place was almost as important in those days as it is to-day, and far more so than up to the beginning of the nineteenth century. And in many respects the laws of Sumer and Babylon regarding women were far superior—from the viewpoint of the woman—to present day statutes.

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"And God said unto Noah, the end of all flesh is come before me. . . . And behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make thee an Ark of gopher wood." Gen., ch. vi., v. 13, 14.

One Phase of the World Catastrophe Whose Memory Persists in the Legends of Every Race and Whose Original Story May Now Be Found.



An Ancient Babylonian Seal Showing the Ark on the Right.



"And Noah went forth, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him; every beast, every creeping thing, and every fowl, and whatsoever creepeth upon the earth, after their kinds, went forth out of the Ark."—Gen., ch. viii., v. 14, 15, 19.

The best instance of this is found in the large collection of marriage contracts engraved in clay tablets in the University Museum's collection. Hundreds of these semi-private documents were found in the temple archives at Nippur. They show that when a woman married she entered into an elaborate civil contract with her husband, the main purpose of which seems to have been to protect her legal rights in any difficulty that might arise later.

The laws of all Babylonia would seem drastic to the worst victims of alimony to-day. One provision in them was that when a man divorced a woman he must pay alimony even though she married

again, provided he got his divorce for the purpose of taking another wife, or for any reason not her fault. Also, at the time of his death under these circumstances she was entitled to a definite share of his estate.

Officials of the University Museum are inclined to believe that further study of Cappadocian tablets in their possession, and excavations in other sections of Mesopotamia, will show that even further back in antiquity women enjoyed a great share of influence and authority. One reason for this is the fact that the most important God of the Sumerians and Babylonians was Ishtar, also known as Nintud, who, according to the ancient legend, created

men out of clay. It was when the Assyrians came down from Nineveh and the cult of Ishtar began to lose ground that woman started to lose her ancient independence and place of equality with men.

Cappadocia, as it is now known, the home of the Hittites, was under the control of Babylon. The discovery by Dr. Sayce that women had authority in the government there is interesting as tending to show that the ancient Babylonians even extended the unusual woman's rights of their time to the women of subject nations. It is interesting to note in this connection that the Armenians of to-day claim to be the direct descendants of the Hittites.

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